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MY LIFE AS HERMIT

RICHARD MELTZER

DEBRA DIPOALO

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For most of the 24 years I've now been writing I've been one stern critic of just about everything, godblessme, and it's only in fairly recent times, say the last seven-eight years, that I've actually turned enough corners *with* my writing that I finally almost don't mind reading my own stuff. No, I don't read it for "pleasure" — I'm not *that* big a narcissist — I read it to proofread it, and the fact that I can stand it as consistently as I do seems a minor miracle. As unswervingly hard as I tend to be on the best efforts, so-called, of all the hacks, superstars and scoundrels of various and sundry creative genres, I at times these days even rather *like* the words and whatnot I manage, somehow, to fill pages with, and certainly not 'cause I've grown any easier to please. Heck, I'm *merciless* with myself, I'm as tough on my ass as on anyone else's, and to get out from under my own savage lash has required work-ethic bullshit up the old wazoo, a commitment of time and effort that's necessitated my becoming a virtual hermit.

I hardly ever leave my apartment cum office, I hardly leave the hardback chair in front of my desk, so it's just as well there's nothing much "out there" to even marginally distract me from the task at hand. Day, night: not much. Would I rather see/hear Philip Glass at Royce Hall, for inst, than endlessly move/shift prepositional phrases up/down/around 8½ X 11 rectangles of beige/white/yellow? Not in ten thousand lifetimes. Would I rather watch the Lakers vs. Utah than do thesaurus scans of synonyms for "prognostic," "acclimatize" and "contextual"? Not in *this* lifetime at least. (For instance.)

Once, though, within the time frame represented by the life of this sheet, just barely but what the hey, there *was* something I left my home for on a regular basis, something I cared for *passionately*, an actual Light which originated locally and lit the world, an undeniable something which without compromise, without *option* of compromise, poked at (and often pierced) the heart and scrotum of many a so-called Beast, either universal or local: L.A. Punk. Before a genius named Darby Crash chose to sigh his last sigh, before the children of Orange County's finest brought their nazi legacy northward to the clubs of Hollywood and etc., before the nation's mightiest Music surrendered its sound (and integrity) in the studios of IRS Records, before the whole damn thing coalesced with rock-as-usual and that subset of local death twaddle — Melrose! — which today owns this paper by the shorthairs, L.A. Punk offered as decisive a break from prevailing death shit qua Culture as anything (on a nearly nightly basis) this town had seen since Central Avenue bebop in the '40s, and I attended its rites fervently, religiously, two-three-four nights a week.

The last show I willingly went to was in some black neighborhood around Inglewood: Black Flag (playing under an assumed name) and three Orange county bands whose identity you'd have to hypnotize me to recall with any certitude. The Adolescents? Dunno. TSOL? A union hall or something. Must've been '81. Midway through Black Flag, who had the good sense to go on first, bottles started flying — full bottles of Budweiser and Heineken (and what sort of weird rich a-hole throws 'em *before* they've been drunk?) — tables got smashed, chairs, windows. (Rock as usual.) After the cops closed the joint, the kids (who heroin addict Peter Townshend used to claim were alright) went out and trashed the ghetto, pissing and puking in doorways, hurling bottles through the windowglass of fried chicken stands, ripping wipers and antennas off old Buicks. Loathsome dogfood: fuck 'em. I never went back.

If I've been inside a rock club since, *any* kind of rock club, makeshift or mainstream, it's been either 'cause I've tem-

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How would you explain this man's recovery from baldness?

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